



Skin Cancer:

Preventing America's Most Common Cancer

The Burden of Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. The three major types of skin cancer are the highly curable basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas and the more serious malignant melanoma. The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that, during 2004, about 1 million new cases of basal cell or squamous cell carcinoma and about 59,350 new cases of malignant melanoma will be diagnosed.

Skin cancer will likely claim the lives of approximately 9,800 Americans in 2004.

Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important environmental factor involved in the development of skin cancer. When used consistently, sun-protective practices can prevent skin cancer. UV rays from artificial sources of light, such as tanning beds and sunlamps, are as

dangerous as those from the sun and should also be avoided.

Although both tanning and burning can increase a person's risk of skin cancer, most Americans do not consistently protect themselves from UV rays. A survey sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that approximately 43% of white children under age 12 had at least one sunburn during the past year.

National Leadership from CDC

CDC provides leadership for nationwide efforts to reduce illness and death caused by skin cancer. Although these efforts comprise a variety of approaches and strategies, their common focus is education and prevention. With fiscal year 2004 appropriations of \$2 million, CDC's major approaches to skin cancer prevention and education are described below.

Disseminating Recommendations

To disseminate information about the importance of minimizing UV exposure during childhood, CDC published *Guidelines for School*

Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Research and Recommendations Report*. Intended to help state and local education agencies and schools play a role in reducing unsafe sun exposure, this publication includes recommendations on

- Establishing policies that reduce exposure to UV radiation.
- Maintaining an environment that supports sun-safety practices.
- Providing health education to students.
- Involving students' families.
- Training health care professionals.
- Evaluating school skin cancer prevention programs.

Who Is at Risk?

Although anyone can develop skin cancer, some people are at particular risk. Risk factors include

- Light skin color, hair color, or eye color.
- Family history of skin cancer.
- Personal history of skin cancer.
- Chronic exposure to the sun.
- History of sunburns early in life.
- Certain types of moles or a large number of moles.
- Freckles, which indicate sun sensitivity and sun damage.



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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The guidelines are available on CDC's Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5104a1.htm>.

CDC continues to work with other federal agencies and the independent Task Force on Community Preventive Services to review studies of community-based interventions targeting skin cancer prevention. Recommended interventions are published in the *Guide to Community Preventive Services*. This publication, available online at <http://www.thecommunityguide.org>, describes proven strategies that communities can use as they plan and implement programs to prevent skin cancer.

Supporting State Initiatives

In October 2003, CDC funded special projects through the state education agencies in Colorado, North Carolina, and Michigan. The state education agencies are piloting interventions that implement the recommendations of CDC's *Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer*. For example, the state of Colorado is making plans to identify skin cancer and sun safety information, train health coordinators in school districts, expand Web site data related to the topic of sun safety, and fund several school districts to implement model programs. In North Carolina, the state education program is working with partners to encourage sun-protective behaviors and policies for youth through physical activity and physical education interventions. Lastly, the state of Michigan is partnering with ACS to build stronger state-level skin cancer prevention partnerships, conduct needs assessment evaluations, and develop and pilot targeted sun-safety educational activities in several public schools. Overall, CDC expects these projects to have the potential to be replicated in other state education agencies and school systems.

Working with Schools

In January 2002, CDC and ACS sponsored *From Guidelines to Action: Skin Cancer Prevention in Schools*, a forum that included national, state, and local leaders in education, public health, and skin cancer prevention. Participants shared strategies for promoting awareness of skin cancer prevention among students, parents, school administrators, and staff. Building on information shared at this forum, CDC developed communication tools for adaptation by education partners to increase awareness, formulate policy, and enhance the school environment for skin cancer prevention.

Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Part II Sun Safety was published by the National Association of State Boards of Education in November 2002. This addition to the association's school health policy guide is based on CDC's *Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer*. It specifies policies that can be adopted by state education authorities, local school districts, and individual schools to make sun safety a vital, integrated part of coordinated school health programs. An executive summary and ordering information can be found at http://www.nasbe.org/HealthySchools/sun_safety.html

During 2003, the Task Force on Community Preventive Services, an independent panel supported by CDC, conducted a systematic review of selected population-based interventions to prevent skin cancer. The review was published in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) Recommendations and Reports*. The research results from the Task Force included recommendations for educational and policy approaches in primary schools and in recreational and tourism settings.

Collecting Data

CDC supports the collection of information on sun-protection behaviors and attitudes and is developing monitoring systems to track national trends in these data. Findings will be used to better target and evaluate skin cancer prevention efforts. During 2003, CDC's National Health Interview Survey and a survey conducted through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System included questions about sun-protection behaviors.

Building Partnerships

The National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention is an alliance working to 1) increase skin cancer awareness and prevention behaviors in all populations, particularly those at high risk, 2) develop and support partnerships that extend and reinforce core messages about behavioral change, 3) coordinate national efforts to reduce skin cancer incidence and deaths, and 4) develop a national skin cancer prevention and education plan. CDC is an active member of this council, as well as a member of the Federal Council on Skin Cancer Prevention, which promotes sun-protection behaviors among federal employees, their families, and agency constituents.

For more information or additional copies of this document, please contact:

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